

Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head - Aquinnah

Location and Land status:

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head is located at the tip of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. The tribal population consists of approximately 801 tribal members. The Tribe currently has approximately 531 acres held in trust by the United States. The Tribe received federal recognition from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1987. The Tribe is located on the coast of New England and its members have traditionally fished and collected the resources along its native seashores.

Tribal Government

The Tribe is governed by a Tribal Council which consists of 11 members including chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, treasurer and seven council members, all popularly elected. The Chief and Medicine Man are traditional members of the Tribal Council and hold their positions for life.

Economy:

Consolidated tribal government programs provide important employment opportunities for tribal members. The Tribal Council oversees a Work Learn program which place young tribal members in employment positions throughout the community.

Tourism has become one of the major island business and individual families run some of the many snack bars and shops up at the cliffs. Many members have moved off the island out of economic necessity and to pursue further educational opportunities.

Culture:

Maintaining and protecting tribal cultural resources is a top priority of the Tribe. The Tribe is developing a Cultural Resource Protection Program. The Tribe strives to preserve its cultural heritage in many ways. Young tribal members belong to the Noepe Cliff Singers (and dancers), a drumming group which celebrates the Wampanoag heritage. The Natural Resources Department strives to protect, preserve and enhance tribal wildlife and natural resources along with sustaining their environments. They monitor water and air quality on tribal lands including Squibnocket and Menemsha Ponds and water sheds. They also provide wildlife and fisheries management, protect tribal cultural resources and provide tribal youth environmental training.

WTGH/EPA Partnerships for Environmental Protection:

The WTGH has worked with and partnered with EPA New England since the early 1990's, and was awarded its first environmental assistance award in 1993. The WTGH received approval for Clean Water Act Section 106 on April 4, 1996; on March 17, 2000 the Tribe received TAS approval for the CWA Section 319 grant program. Since 1997, the Tribe has received Performance Partnership Grants (PPGs) from EPA; the PPG process consolidates planning and program funding from several different environmental programs under one assistance agreement to the Tribe. The Tribe and EPA are currently working on a Tribal Environmental Agreement (TEA) and a Quality Management Program (QMP) agreement.

Environmental Accomplishments

The Natural Resources Department has many ongoing projects from environmental education to wetlands assessment and management. The Department has developed a water quality-sampling regimen for the Menemsha Pond watershed. The Lead program now has a licensed lead inspector and will be conducting lead inspections in tribal member homes.

The areas of environmental protection that the Tribal program is focusing on include the following: 1) Building a certified drinking water laboratory; 2) conducting Air monitoring of PM with the National Improve monitoring network in conjunction with the weather station; 3) installation of catch basins to prevent non-point source pollution; 4) Biomonitoring data collection to determine wetland and watershed health; 5) develop and implement a well head protection program.

There is a great level of concern regarding Noman's Island that was used as a bombing range by the military and is currently being evaluated to determine the level of harm that the use of this Island had on the surrounding resources. The Tribe is also concerned about the level of contaminants ingested by the tribal member that consume the fish and shell fish in the local waters due to the fish and shellfish state advisories for Mercury in the immediate area. The Tribe will begin collecting data concerning the local air deposition to begin to assess the current environmental condition on tribal lands.